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IMPERIAL GERMANY

A LECTURE

— BY

BERNARD MOSES

BERKELEY, CAL.

1886



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Imperial Germany.*

THE events associated with the foundation and development of the new German Empire constitute the most important episode in the history of Europe since the fall of Napoleon. They stand as the culmination of a series of events beginning with the Prussian reaction against French domination in 1813. To be understood, they must be viewed in the light of the failure of the arrangement effected by the Congress of Vienna, and of the more or less aimless struggles embraced under the general designation of the Revolution of 1848. The new German Empire arose out of the ruins of the mediæval empire which ceased to exist in 1806, when Francis II. laid down the imperial crown. At the time of its dissolution, the mediæval empire was one of the oldest political institutions of

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Europe. Its existence stretched over the thousand years from Charlemagne, in the beginning of the ninth century, to Napoleon, in the beginning of the nineteenth century. It rested on the sublime idea that it was the sole instrument for manifesting and executing the will of God with reference to the political government of the world. This idea constituted the basis of its pretension to universal dominion, but, like many of the ideas suggested by the distorted Christianity of the Middle Ages, it was utterly unrealizable. The mediæval empire was formed under the influence of religious visionaries, and declined with the awakening practical intelligence of modern times. The central power of the Empire gradually vanished before the rising power of the constituent States, till at last the Emperor retained only an empty name and a powerless scepter.

The year which witnessed the final dissolution of this ancient institution saw also the establishment of the Confederation of the Rhine. This Confederation had little significance, except as a means for facilitating the exercise of French influence in the affairs of Germany. It was under the protection of Napoleon, who had "the power of summoning the Federal Assembly, and of initia-

ting all discussions in it, through its prince-president, the Duke of Dalberg." He had also "the right of naming the prince-president, and the right of commanding the confederation to make war or peace."

With the overthrow of Napoleon, in 1814, the Confederation disappeared, and the political disintegration of Germany became complete. Before 1814, the year marked by the Congress of Vienna, the most persistent political tendency in the history of Germany was the tendency toward disunion and particularism. With this year, however, begins an opposite course of progress, leading by successive steps to a more complete governmental union of the German people. The first step in this new direction was the formation of the Germanic Confederation, comprehending all the German states, under the presidency of Austria. The second step was the formation of the North German Union in which several of the most important South German states, as Austria, Bavaria, Würtemberg, and Baden, were not included. The final step was the organization of the Empire. This event is noteworthy not merely because through it was secured the present union of a large part of the German people under one supreme gov-

ernment, but also because in it there was adopted a constitutional provision contributing to secure the perpetual maintenance of this union. The provision referred to is that by which the power to veto any proposition for constitutional change is placed in the hands of Prussia, whose government is strongly blended with the government of the Empire, whose King is also Emperor, and whose interests demand not only that the bonds of union between the States be maintained, but that the States be brought into a closer union and more complete subordination to the central government. If we bear in mind these facts, that Prussia has seventeen members in the Federal Council, appointed by the King, that fourteen negative votes in this Council are adequate to defeat any proposed constitutional amendment, and that Prussia is vitally interested in defeating all constitutional changes that do not tend to strengthen the central government, we can readily see that, in the establishment of the Empire, we have not merely the fact of German unity achieved, but at the same time the strongest possible check laid on the spirit of decentralization. Nothing short of a revolution or the overthrow of the imperial

government by a foreign state can stop the slow but sure drift of power towards the center.

But within the central government itself, the distribution of power is not such as to insure premanency of the present political order among the several departments. It is true, generally, that it is impossible to apportion the power of a government among the several departments so nicely that they will continue, as it were, in a condition of stable equilibrium. One or another will inevitably have an advantage of position, and thus gradually draw to itself the balance of power. In the early English government, the possession of the right of initiating financial legislation constituted the Commons' advantage of position. Through this it has been possible for that body to arrogate to itself all that power which was formerly held by other departments. In the course of political change there is manifest a strong tendency to unite the initiating, adopting, and executing powers in the same person or body; and when popular representation is admitted and maintained, that body which stands in closest sympathy with the electors will ultimately acquire the balance of power in the government, and hold the position of superior independence. In the imperial government of

Germany popular representation is admitted, but the representative body has only the power to accept or reject propositions submitted to it. It has no power to initiate measures, and consequently no power to make its originating will felt directly in the affairs of government. Whenever the initiating function is withheld from the representative branch of the legislature a conflict is inaugurated which will result in the representative body becoming either more or less. In England, where this condition of affairs formerly existed, the representative body has gained not only the right of initiating measures, but also an acknowledged supremacy over the other departments of government. The Reichstag, or representative body in the imperial legislature, in its control over taxation, has essentially the position of advantage through which the English Commons achieved independence. If the Reichstag fails to make use of its advantage, the Emperor, ministry, and federal council will extend their authority at its expense. Any organ of the sovereign, in the unrestrained exercise of its delegated power, will always tend to enlarge the field of its jurisdiction. As long as the majority of the Reichstag is in essential accord with the ministry and federal council,

this body may be content simply to register its affirmative or negative decision on propositions submitted to it; but when the majority of the members find themselves committed to propositions which the initiating bodies are reluctant to formulate into laws, the representatives will imperatively demand the right of initiating bills through which they may give direct expression to their views. That the views of a large number of the representatives, in the near future, will stand in sharp contrast to those of the ministry may be clearly seen from the fact that every election brings into the Reichstag an increased number of members whose fundamental political principles are in direct conflict with those of the Emperor and his ministers. If the balance of power in the imperial government drifts into the Reichstag, it will fall into the hands of men for the most part untrained in self-government. For generations under military tutelage and class domination, the Germans of the Empire have lost much of that power of self-determination and self-restraint which are necessary to the conduct of a government by representatives of the people. If, on the other hand, power drifts more completely into the hands of the Emperor and his ministers,

the imperial government will assume that form of absolutism which marked the governments of nearly all important European states in the seventeenth century, and whose disastrous outcome in most cases is a familiar tale of history. One or the other of these alternatives will inevitably be realized, and in neither direction is the outlook specially hopeful.

Those who judge of the excellences or defect of government from the somewhat exalted standpoint of metaphysical speculation, are likely to award that one the first place which possesses the most complete organization and is most successful in preserving peace and order among its subjects. There is no doubt that the maintenance of an efficient police supervision over the conduct of its citizens is an important function of the state. Judged merely with reference to its success in this direction, the present German government must be given a very high rank. There is very much in this phase of its activity to excite admiration. But repression is not the only aim of wise political administration. It is one of the highest aims of government so to order public affairs that the individuals who make up the nation shall not degenerate. When this end is overlooked in

attempts to carry out thoroughly a system of minute control, the government is not attaining its highest purpose. As the organism which thinks and speaks for the multitudes, who recognize its authority, it is the business of the government to make possible such conditions as will favor the growth of a strong, temperate, self-reliant, and intelligent nation. The repressive policy of the German Empire, curtailing on every side the field of independent individual action, and hedging each citizen about so narrowly that he loses much of the feeling of personal responsibility, tends to degrade the great body of the nation to the position of an unthinking rabble. Repression, therefore, breeds a condition of society which makes repression necessary. It carries with it no hope of a better state. Once entered upon, it becomes a necessity, and by it the nation is driven into successive stages of social irresponsibility, till at last it is torn asunder in the conflicts of classes, or ends ingloriously in utter stagnation.

There is something worse in a nation than the confusion and uproar of democracy, and that is orderly conduct which has been reached at the cost of social independence and individual self-respect. Venice and Florence, in their careers

as independent states, illustrate the contrast. The officers of the Venetian government, in the execution of the repressive policy, were omnipresent and omniscient. The citizen who stepped aside from his narrowly prescribed course of conduct was speedily, and often without ceremony, overtaken by the penalty of the violated law. As a result, throughout a long period of its history, Venice remained remarkably free from internal strife and noisy popular disturbance. Yet, in spite of all the advantages of abundant wealth, of internal quiet, and extensive intercourse with the most cultivated nations of the world, Venice did not produce men who have made themselves remembered. Florence, on the other hand, which for centuries was filled with struggles of parties and the uproar of political agitation, occupies a large place in the history of European civilization, and many of the most exalted spirits of modern times received their first and abiding impulses from the free life of the republic. It is not, however, pertinent to the subject in hand to affirm or deny that literature, art, and learning will thrive under a governmental policy which may be designated as repressive or protective. What I wish specially to emphasize is, that

although such a policy prevails in Germany, it can, under no interpretation, be set down as an element in the cause of that nation's exalted position in the intellectual world. The men who have given Germany her scholarly reputation are not the products of a stagnant society; in fact communities or nations that are willing or are forced to allow everything to be done for them are not likely to produce original or creative minds. In refutation of this view the reign of Louis XIV. is often cited. A critical examination of this portion of French history shows, however, that the literary splendor of the reign of Louis XIV. "was not the result of his efforts, but was the work of that great generation which preceded him; and that the intellect of France, so far from being benefited by his munificence, was hampered by his protection." The national intellect was stunted by the supervision of the court, and, "as a natural consequence, the minds of men, driven from the higher departments, took refuge in the lower, and concentrated themselves upon those inferior subjects where the discovery of truth is not the main object, but where beauty of form and expression are the things chiefly pursued." The influence of the reign of Louis XIV. on the in-

tellectual life of France was, in the first place, "to sacrifice science to art," and, in the second place, to cause the decay of art itself.

But no parallel between Germany and France in this regard is possible, for Germany is only now entering upon a phase of history through which France passed long ago. England, France, and Spain passed through brilliant periods of intellectual activity and literary culture before Germany had fully shaken off the slumber of the Middle Ages. The Protestant Reformation, which turned all intellectual force to theological study and discussion; the Thirty-Years' War, which destroyed the nation's basis of physical support; and the subsequent century of recuperation, filled with petty jealousies and internal wars, furnish adequate reason for the late development of the German people. Their great intellectual achievements belong to the century since the death of Frederick the Great, a century in which the great body of the people have continued a living and originating force. In the struggle for independence, in 1813, they played a leading part. When Prussia entered the war against Napoleon the same year, the people lead and the king followed. The political agitations which made the middle

years of the century memorable, showed the people still able of taking a vigorous initiative. Pursuing this line of thought, it becomes clear that Germany has grown to her present degree of intellectual eminence under social conditions entirely unlike those which have been imposed on the nation by the Empire. The past century of German history which records the rise of the nation to greatness, records also the operations of a spirit of popular unrest, and strong national aspirations towards an exalted end more or less definitely conceived. Whether the influence of the existing system, which tends to crowd the common people into a uniformity of insignificance, will be such as to continue the growth of the past hundred years, can be definitely determined only by the enquirers of the next century. The teaching of the repressive policy, however, as seen in history, suggests a probable negative. There may be schools of perfect organization and equipment, but unless there is independence of character in the bulk of the nation, and a strong feeling of self-reliance and self-respect, it is vain to look for the development or continuance of national greatness. There may be the most efficient army in the world, but it

will be no guarantee of continued prosperity, if the expenditure for its maintenance absorbs an undue portion of the national income. The army of the Empire is no doubt necessary to preserve the integrity of the imperial territory, but at the same time the burden which it imposes on the nation must be set down among the sources of economic weakness.

Germany at present is in the condition of the athlete who has attained the object of his training and is at the height of his vigor. His wonderful development, however, is no guarantee of a long life and a hearty old age. On the contrary, the records of such lives show an astonishingly large number of cases suffering early death or premature decline. They have paid out the reserve and therefore must suspend operations. By nature poor in resources, Germany has undertaken, by checking the influx of the world's wealth, to provide for its vast expenditures and thus put off the day of exhaustion. It is attempting to become rich by shutting its doors to the offered abundance of other nations.

Considering the motives which move men to wealth-production, it is a self-evident proposition that if men are left free to act, they will put

forth their productive forces in the direction of their greatest productive ability; and no central power, however far-seeing in its paternal supervision, can determine this direction in the millions of individual cases as well as the individuals themselves. It follows, therefore, that where the individual members of a nation are left free in their industrial and commercial activity, there will be the maximum of wealth-production for the nation as a whole. But the German government has seen fit to thrust its interfering hand not only into that which the English people are disposed to regard as the peculiar realm of personal liberty, but also into the affairs of industry and trade. By its restrictions and impositions, it has lifted certain departments into unnatural prominence, and crowded others into enforced insignificance. This policy has had a threefold result. In the first place, it has brought to the government an increased revenue, which has enabled it not only to meet its current expenses, but also to build numerous imposing structures, either for use in practical affairs or for commemorating the heroic achievements of the army. This architectural display, supported by the revenues of the government, has betrayed superficial observers into the con-

viction that the nation itself is growing rich. In the second place, this policy of industrial and commercial restriction has had the effect of bringing about a more unequal distribution of wealth, giving to certain manufacturers increased gains, without at the same time adding materially to the aggregate gains of the nation, or increasing proportionately the rewards of labor. The wealth that has been added to the manufacturer's store has been taken from the store of the consumer, for while prices have advanced, wages have remained comparatively stationary. Thus, in the third place, this policy has contributed to the difficulties which the bulk of the population experience in maintaining a decent existence. Prices have been raised by excluding other nations from free competition in the markets, but the incomes of the masses have not risen in a corresponding degree, if they have risen at all. In fact Prussian statistics seem to indicate that the class whose incomes are less than one hundred and twenty-five dollars a year, has increased much faster than other classes. In 1882, this class constituted more than one quarter of the Prussian population, and in the preceding five years it had increased by a million and a half. "The statistics of the other Ger-

man States," writes Geffcken in 1884, "show a similar result; the poor-rates have increased everywhere in an alarming proportion, and the number of vagrants and tramps have become a general plague. Our industrial production suffers from chronic plethora, its net produce does not correspond to its immense expansion, still less is a real amelioration of the situation of the working classes to be discerned. The supply of labor generally exceeds the demands; consequently wages do not rise, and the lower strata of the population can absorb comparatively little of the mass of products which are daily thrown upon the market, because the scantiness of their earnings does not allow them to satisfy correspondingly their wants. But in the higher classes also all the callings are overcrowded; the increase of academical students has been abnormal and far exceeding the demand, and a considerable part of this surplus of trained forces, finding no employment, perishes or launches into adventures. In short, everywhere we find an enhanced struggle for existence, which engenders dissatisfaction and hopelessness, and furnishes social democracy with fresh recruits."

The influence of the German government, with reference to this last suggestion by Dr. Geffcken,

merits thoughtful consideration; I mean the influence of the imperial policy on the socialistic agitation of the present. Reduced to its lowest terms, the doctrine of modern Socialism is an affirmation on the much-debated question as to the proper sphere of governmental action. "It is not only a theory of the state's action, but a theory of the state's action founded on a theory of the laborer's right." It is the extreme opposite to that theory which maintains the "absolute abstention on the part of the state in all that concerns material well-being." Such a theory of state action as that embodied in Socialism is not in keeping with the democratic spirit; it is rather to be considered as a logical outgrowth of a monarchy which extends its paternal protection and control over many details which in a republic are left to the discreet management of individuals. It is natural, therefore, to expect the development of the socialistic doctrine in Germany, where power is exercised under a liberal conception of the sphere of state authority, rather than in a republic where the people are jealous of state power, even when it is delegated by themselves. The practice of the German government, in entering extensively into the affairs of business, has tended to deepen the conviction that it might,

with advantage to the laborers, go to still greater lengths in the ownership of the agents of production. In maintaining the army, moreover, conditions are established favorable to the increase of Socialism. Large numbers of men are called from those occupations in which they must rely on their individual efforts for support, to spend a series of years under conditions where the burden of support is shifted to the government. Going back from the army to a society in which the struggle for life is severe, they carry with them the knowledge of what the state may do to relieve them of the labor and anxieties of this struggle. Having seen that the state can successfully manage great productive enterprises, and also that it may support under its immediate charge large bodies of its citizens, they are, at this stage, ripe for the reception of the socialistic gospel. The very process, through which a large number of minds have been fitted to receive a new social dispensation, has also prepared some of the bolder spirits to become heralds of the glad tidings. From these and other considerations more or less dependent on the action and organization of the society, we are able to see how the German nation has become the mother of the present discontent, and the Em-

pire the breeding place of agitators whose fanaticism is only equalled by their social short-sightedness. They become a menace to social order, not because their views prove false the accepted basis of society, but because they appeal to those elements of the community whose actions are not a matter of reason but of sympathy. They are the product of a rigid and repressive administration, yet the end of their agitation is a system which, to be successful, must be a thousand times more rigid and far-reaching in its tyranny than any government which they oppose. Their opposition is thorough, but not necessarily enlightened or consistent. In their missionary tours, they do not stop to understand either the faults or the excellences of different governments, but are ready, without examining them, to lay destructive hands on all.

When republican doctrines were being carried out in France, in 1789, the adherents of monarchy in Europe thought themselves justified in combining to prevent their spread to other countries. Had the efforts of the several monarchical states been confined to upholding their own institutions against the assaults of immigrants from republican France, just men everywhere would have been in sympathy with

their undertaking. But in attempting to crush republicanism in France, they went beyond their proper sphere. The citizens of the republic of the United States have no desire to seek to modify the social and political institutions of the German Empire, or to interfere with their production of socialists or anarchists; they desire only that the foul brood may be retained and fed in the original nest. While the repressive and protective governmental policy of Germany, which limits in a large measure the personal independence of the subject, is the fundamental cause of this social revolt, it has a secondary cause in the hard economic conditions to which the masses are doomed. Yet these hard economic conditions are the very foundation of excellence in certain departments. In the United States it is difficult to persuade men of high attainments to devote their lives to primary teaching for the low salary at which women, not of high attainments, may be induced to undertake the work. The opportunities for individual enterprise, with sure and abundant material reward, call men to other pursuits. But in Germany men of high attainments are willing for an assured pittance to devote their lives to instruction in the lower schools, recognizing the

fact that if they abandon their positions they will be thrown into a severe struggle for existence without certainty of satisfactory reward. Thus the poverty of German resources keeps men in these lower but vastly important positions. The superiority of German schools, therefore, over those of the United States, is in large part due to the inferiority of Germany's opportunities for advancing material well-being. It is not because the German loves money less than the American, but simply because his opportunities for getting it are worse.

Thus far I have spoken only of the internal forces and tendencies of the Empire. What the operation of these forces will be in the future will depend somewhat upon the position which the Empire maintains in the group of Western nations. The external relations of the Germans have been vague and indefinite because the people have lacked national unity. We are able to point out, however, in the course of German history various periods when the foreign relations of the nation have been of marked influence in determining its internal development. In the first stages of German imperialism, the connection between Germany and Italy was most important. It was the connection of a nation

having traditions of cultivation, with a nation whose traditions smacked of the forests and barbarism. The German soldiers followed the Emperors over the Alps, and many never returned, but there came back from Italy germs of a higher culture. Still the men who had acquired in Italy somewhat of cultivation, and tasted the refinements of an old civilization, remained always under the fatal attraction which allured them to the shores of the Mediterranean. When the bond was severed which had bound Germany and Italy into one great Empire, the several states of Germany were pretending to independence, and the relations between them were assuming the form of international relations. When the people were finally divided by their ecclesiastical quarrels, the way was prepared for a great national humiliation. The utter material desolation which appeared in the track of the Thirty-Years' War was not a greater national calamity than that loss of independence which is manifest when we behold the Protestant states knocking at the doors of foreign princes, and asking for aid and protection, and the emperor submitting to conditions which practically deprived him of the imperial dignity, in order to secure the services of such an adventurer as

Wallenstein. But even a greater depth was reached in the eighteenth century, when every petty prince of Germany constructed the ceremony of his court and the administration of his principality after the model of the court and administration of Louis XIV. French influence was so thoroughly dominant that it paralyzed all manifestations of the German spirit, and rendered futile all attempts to further the national development. Even so conspicuous a leader of the Germans as Frederick the Great exerted whatever influence he possessed in favor of extending in Germany the culture of France.

The complete national demoralization of Germany at the close of the last century, the loss of national consciousness, and the almost entire absence of lofty patriotism, made it comparatively easy for the conquered German States to submit to the conditions of the Napoleonic rule. With some other nations this would have meant a far greater sacrifice. Had the English, for example, been obliged to submit to similar conditions, it would have cost them the painful renunciation of that which had grown to be a vital part of their moral being. But the moral being of the German at that time was incomplete; it lacked the essential element of love of country. It was

only when the patriotic trumpet blasts of Körner and of Arndt swept over the land, and roused a responsive echo in the hearts of the people, that the lacking element was supplied. The history of Germany's relation to foreign powers previous to this time is an unenviable record. But at this point begins a period of great national achievements in foreign affairs, through the important crises of which the nation has been carried by the well-directed force of patriotic enthusiasm. While the struggle was for independence, as in 1813, or for bringing about a more perfect national union, as in 1866 and in 1870, it was comparatively easy to keep alive the patriotic fire; and in so far as the reign of William has created a tradition of heroic achievements in which the members of all states are proud to claim participation, there has been added a stimulus to the maintenance of the newly awakened consciousness. But the pressure of poverty, which is being felt by a larger and larger part of the population, tends in time of peace to crush out patriotic sentiment and breed discontent. Yet no way appears open to the Empire for an offensive war of conquest through which to quiet discontent and arouse once more popular enthusiasm; and the defen-

sive war which must be undertaken against Russia sooner or later cannot be said to offer a flattering prospect either to the government or to the people. Although, therefore, the Germans have known how to make use of external pressure from various sides to weld the bonds of national union, and to create a powerful sentiment in favor of the Empire, the way does not appear open to an equally advantageous use of those relations in the future. There seems to be no scope for the future activity of the Empire in international affairs but to stand in a position of resistance. It has extended its territory to a point which reason and the traditions of the nation suggest as a proper limit. It has closed a successful movement towards union with a series of brilliant victories, and it may now abstain from pursuing an aggressive policy with entire self-respect; in fact, there is no direction in which such a policy can be pursued with advantage and a show of justice. But with the nations which stand as rivals of the Empire, France and Russia, the case is quite different. They are predetermined to aggression: France, by reason of her wounded pride, her great losses of territory and wealth and her desire to regain the position so long held as the leader of European

civilization; Russia, through the force of a tendency as old as the monarchy, and which for a thousand years has been making itself manifest in pushing out the borders of the Empire in all directions. Between these two powers, the German Empire, in the immediate future, is doomed to the ungrateful task of maintaining a powerful army of defense. In the case of a nation like France, whose parts have had no independent existence for centuries, external pressure tends to unite all parties and factions in the vigorous pursuit of a common end, in other words, to bring about a more complete national consolidation. But in the case of Germany, where the several States retain a happy memory of independence, external pressure will not necessarily bring about a more complete union and consolidation. If it is strong enough to threaten to overwhelm the Empire, it will the rather have a tendency to loosen the bonds of union between the States and lead them to seek safety in foreign alliances, thereby destroying the integrity of the imperial state. Therefore, although the constitution has provided the strongest political barrier possible against the disintegration of the Empire, such disintegration may become one of the unavoidable consequences of an aggressive

policy on the part of France or Russia. That such is to be the policy of these two nations does not admit of doubt. France which all the world is disposed to leave in peace within her borders, does not wish peace. Her annual army expenses are now even more than those of the German Empire; and it is not to be supposed that the French nation is building up a great military establishment simply that it may later go to pieces through idleness and corruption. By this vast expenditure, France is preparing means which, in the impending European war, may enable her to have revenge on her ancient enemy and set up once more her former prestige.

The initiative, however, in Germany's embarrassments from without is not likely to be taken by France, but by Russia. Two hundred and fifty years ago the western limit of this colossal empire was a line running through a point east of the site of St. Petersburg. The political center of the Czar's dominions has thus been transferred to a region which in the seventeenth century was a part of the Swedish territory. In this gradual and apparently irresistible movement westward, many states and provinces have been absorbed, till at last a halt has been made on the borders of the German Empire. Whether

this halt will be permanent or merely temporary will depend upon the ability of Germany to set up a wall of defense firm enough to resist the glacier-like movement of the Russian power. For an indisputable solution of this doubt history affords only one method, that of actual conflict; and in the conflict, or series of conflicts, which is to determine the relative position of two nations, the ultimate supremacy will incline to that nation which has the more abundant resources, either realized or undeveloped, of men and wealth. In this respect Russia and the United States are the two leading nations of the world. They are nations not yet in the prime of life, whose period of maximum wealth and power relatively to other nations is in the future; while some of the other Western states, as Spain and, perhaps, England, have passed their prime, and in the future of civilization will grow relatively less. Russia, therefore, appears to be destined to fill a larger place than hitherto in the community of nations, and it is not improbable that earlier or later some of its territorial expansion will be gained at the expense of the German Empire. But for a determination of the extent to which the Napoleonic prophecy will be fulfilled we look to the future.







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